

## SEMANTIC CONTENT OF IGBO TRADITIONAL NON-VERBAL MODES OF COMMUNICATION

OKEKE, CHUKWUMA ONYEBUCHI & OBASI, GLORIA TOCHUKWU

Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian Languages, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

### ABSTRACT

In any society, information dissemination and sharing is one of the basic elements of survival, development and social integration. Societies have attained different levels of sophistication in their various information sharing techniques depending on their levels of advancement. Therefore, this paper appraises the traditional non-verbal modes of communication in Igboland as a vital means of information exchange and a rudimentary requirement of the Igbo society. Through the survey research methodology, the paper x-rays Igbo traditional non-verbal modes of communication, viz. instrumental, animal and iconographic and visual mode, bearing in mind the sociolinguistic landscape of linguistics and communicative competence. The results of the finding of the paper from the data analysis show that even though Igbo traditional non-verbal modes are still in use, they are seriously competing with external influences as epitomized by the cultural forces of transnational corporations. The paper recommends that interest in traditional channels of communication, be properly nurtured and preserved to re-awaken the self consciousness of the Igbo people and promote unity, social integration and development among them.

**KEYWORDS:** Animal, Iconographic Modes, Instrumental, Meaning and Non-Verbal Modes

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information by speech, visuals, signals, writing, behaviour, etc. Communication has always played an indispensable role in the life of man. The need to inform and be informed, as well as to share feelings and thoughts has been the centre piece of inter-personal relationships as far back as memory can recall. Man, therefore, and indeed all animate beings have over the years developed systems of communication, verbal and non-verbal, necessary for maintaining progress in society. So, the crucial roles which linguistics and language play in communication cannot be over-emphasised.

According to Diringer (1982), communication is a process that started perhaps even before we knew how to write or spell the word 'communication'. It perhaps dates back to the advent of life itself. From the linguistic point of view, Crystal (1997:72) defines communication as:

... the transmission and reception of information (a 'massage') between a source and a receiver using a signaling system. In linguistic context, source and receiver are interpreted in human terms, the system involved in a language, the notion of response to (or acknowledgement of) the message becomes of crucial importance

The implication in the above definition is that communication is a process of sharing information, ideas, feelings, emotions, etc. The above information also shows that communication requires a sender, a message, and a recipient,

although the receiver need not be present or aware of the sender's intent to communicate at the time of communication. Thus, communication can occur across vast distances in time and space. Communication requires that the communicating parties share an area of communicative commonality. The communication process is complete once the receiver has understood the message of the sender. Communication is also a powerful force in unifying a people and in involving the individuals in the national political system, economic and developmental programmes in their area. To attempt to build a tower into Heaven, according to Genesis 11:1-9, aptly summarises the relevance of communication in human society. It shows the magnitude of man's solidarity, their well-being and upon all, the power of a commonly shared means of communication in nation building.

Based on Oppaper's (2011) postulations, every human society has developed its indigenous and traditional modes and channels of communication, which characterise its existence, organisation and development. These communication modes and channels form the basis upon which these communities, especially the rural communities progress. The act of interaction according to Oppaper is primarily carried out through the use of signs (or symbols). Such signs or symbols must arouse the same meaning in the other person (individual, group or people) as it does in oneself.

Communication as an element of culture, therefore, exists in varying degrees before the British adventure in the territory called Igboland today. No matter how crude these communication modes appear to be as at that time and even presently, they were serving the purpose of message dissemination to the ayes and nays of everyone. No wonder Otagburuagu (2004) posits that whatever the form of communication, verbal or non-verbal, visual or audio, interpersonal or intrapersonal, dominating or incidental, social or transcendental, if it is not audience-specific, it does not take into account the traditional, social and dynamics of society; it will only succeed in alienating the highly placed from the majority of the people in the rural areas.

Therefore, traditional communication with its various forms is alive and well. It is a process and system which utilise symbols, values and institutions which directly appeal and readily connect with people and, thus, enhance the variety and effectiveness of the message that circulates in the community. Traditional communication system or indigenous communication system encapsulates folk that is ingrained in the culture of the community (see Wang and Dissanayake 1984 for details). Traditional communication, then, is communication done in most rural areas through traditional means or channels. According to Akpabio (2003), other ways of referring to traditional communication system are man media, oral media, informal media, informal channel of communication and communal media.

A variety of verbal and non-verbal modes of communication exist in many societies. Lottie (1982) points out that those verbal and non-verbal elements of communication are complementary and that one cannot entirely neglect one or the other, whether they are traditional or modern. These non-verbal modes include body language, eye contact, sign language, haptic communication, chronemics and media, such as pictures, graphics, sound and writing. But this paper is only interested in the non-verbal means of communication in Igboland. The interest in these non-verbal communication modes is awakened because a substantial portion of our traditional communication is non-verbal, (Kendra 2011). Every day, we respond to thousands of non verbal cues and behaviours including postures, facial expressions, eye gazes, gestures and tone of voice. From our handshakes to our hairstyles, non-verbal details reveal who we are and impact how we relate to other people. But this means of identity and social cohesion is gradually fading away in the Igbo culture because of lack of documentation of these traditional modes, indifference of the Igbo to their core values, westernisation, among others.

The non-verbal communication modes are many but this paper will explore four of them viz: instrumental, iconographic, visual and animal modes.

This paper is in six sections and numbered sequentially viz.: introduction, review of literature, methodology, data presentation and analysis, effects of non-verbal modes of communication in Igboland and finally, summary of the findings, recommendations and conclusion.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section of the paper reviews related literature in relation to the paper based on the sub-headings below.

### 2.1 Human Communication

The word communication according to Okunna (1999) is derived from ‘commurus’, a Latin word meaning common. It is a means of information exchange solely used by humans. Human communication according to Nathan (2004) can be studied from several viewpoints, including behavioural, theoretical and linguistic perspectives. Below are the details of the above perspectives according to Nathan (2004). Behaviourally, communication consists of social interaction among individuals and to communicate means that our actions affect the behaviour of another person or group of persons. Also, speech and language represent acts that affect the action of others.

From the theoretical perspective, communication has been defined as the process of sending and receiving messages that serve to transmit information between persons or groups. When someone successfully transmits a message that is understood by someone else, communication has occurred.

On the other hand, communication from the linguistic perspective is defined as a rule-based mental system of language code for expressing and understanding thoughts, feelings and ideas. And a code is a system of rules for arranging arbitrary symbols in an orderly, predictable manner that allows anyone who also knows the code to interpret the meaning. The objectives of communication, therefore, rest mainly on the bedrock of language.

Communication has caught the attention of many scholars and they have contributed theoretically towards the study. It is important to note that all creatures in the universe communicate in different ways and frequencies. Communication patterns and modes vary from one species to another, and sometimes from one environment to another. No wonder Otagburuagu (2004:1) defines communication as “a give and take process – the transmission of information from one person to another using symbols or codes which are more meaningful, to both the information transmitter and the receiver.” According to Jawawera (1991:17), “Communication shapes the work we do, the homes we live, the things we invent. Communication determines the friends we make, the crisis we provoke, the war we fight and indeed, the peace we enjoy. It sustains the rhythm of the world.

It is an interaction process through which persons or groups relate to each other and share information, experiences and culture.” The above definition by Jawawera reflects some elements of traditional means of communication with emphasis on ‘shared information and culture’. In order to bring the ideal to limelight, the intrinsic values of communication lie wholly on the idea of something being transferred from one person to another. Again, the essence of communication both primitive (traditional form) and modernised, is geared towards sharing of ideas, information, opinions, feelings or experiences between people.

Communication can also be used to direct or lead a group towards a particular cause of action; it can be used to motivate or create a conducive or enabling environment in which people around want to organise themselves as a group so as to contribute their quota towards achieving set goals. Without communication, the existence of an organisation will be paralysed, and the society as we know it will be impossible to organise. In fact, the role of effective communication is summed up in the statement credited to Moraghan (1981) in Akpan (1987:3-4)

If we had no communication..., our lives would be static; there would be no growth, no transformation. We would not be enlightened; we would live in total ignorance. Life would not be worth living. Without communication, we humans become impoverished, less strong, something less human, and lose the ability to extend ourselves and to change.

## 2.2 Traditional Modes of Communication

The traditional mode is the oldest means of communicating information in Africa before the advent of modern media of print and electronics. Since time immemorial, the human race had used primitive and simple forms of communication which have been enhanced, refined and are still in use today in all societies despite continuous investigation of new technologies and the increasing sophistication and complexities of interaction between or among people. According to Linda (1998), the traditional media of communication are as old as time itself.

They are part of the cultural heritage of the African people before the advent of Western civilisation that brought with it the modern mass media and other overpowering influence. Although the mass media are modernised, the traditional media are still used by the African people to disseminate information. They are parts of the people's way of life which cannot be easily eradicated or erased from their life. In support of this, Williams (1971: 16) says, "The African people, in spite of their great linguistic and ethnic diversities have been communicating among themselves in a wide variety of ways for a long time. In fact, they are a range and wide variety of interpersonal communication."

Wilson (1998:27) provides six classes of various forms of non-verbal traditional communication modes he observed in Africa, which are presented below:

### Instrumental

- |                     |   |   |
|---------------------|---|---|
| (i) Idiophones      | - | wooden drum, wood block, ritual rattle bell, metal gong, xylophone, hand shakers, pot drum, etc |
| (ii) Membranephones | - | skin drum   |
| (iii) Aerophones    | - | whistle, deer horn, ivory tusk, reed pipe, decorated bamborino                                  |
| (iv) Symbolography  | - | nsibidi, tattoo, chalk marks  |

### Demonstration

- |             |   |   |
|-------------|---|---|
| (i) Music   | - | songs, choral   |
| (ii) Signal | - | entertainment music, cannon gunshot, whistle, camp fire |



**Iconographic**

- |                 |   |   |
|-----------------|---|---|
| (i) Objectified | - | charcoal, white dove, kolanut, cow tail, white clay, egg, feather, calabash, beads, limb bones, drinking gourds, flay |
| (ii) Floral     | - | young unopened palm frond, okono tree, plantain stem  |

**Extra-Mundane**

- |                 |   |                          |
|-----------------|---|--------------------------|
| (i) Incantation | - | ritual, libation, vision |
| (ii) Graphic    | - | obituary                 |

**Visual**

- |                 |   |                             |
|-----------------|---|-----------------------------|
| (iii) Colour    | - | white cloth, red cloth, etc |
| (iv) Appearance | - | dressing, hairstyle         |

**Institutional**

- |                |   |                       |
|----------------|---|-----------------------|
| (i) Social     | - | marriage, chieftaincy |
| (ii) Spiritual | - | shrine, masquerade    |

**2.3 Non-Verbal Communication**

Wilson (1990) defines traditional nonverbal communication as an admixture of social conventions and practices which have almost become sharpened and blended into veritable communication modes and systems and which have almost become standard practices for society. In non-verbal communication according to Hybel and Weaver (1989), words are not used in passing across the information. But they quickly added that non-verbal communication is, however, not totally devoid of vocal activity. It can involve a vocal activity, provided the output is not a recognisable word in any human language. Here, Hybel and Weaver (1989) identify four basic principles of non-verbal communication, which are:

- It is culture dependent, that is, much of the non-verbal cues we use in communication are passed on to us by our parents and the older members of the community.
- It may conflict with our verbal messages to the extent that our intentions may be misinterpreted. This happens when one says one thing, while one's action sends a completely different message. This situation can give rise to a mixed message.
- It is largely unconscious, that is, in most situations; we are unaware of some of the non-verbal cues that we employ in getting across our messages to hearers.
- It is important in revealing our attitudes, emotions, and feelings to the person, or persons with whom we are communicating or the subject matter of the discourse.

This paper, however, adopts Wilson's (1998) classes of various forms of traditional modes of communication in Nigeria with the addition of animal communication, and Hybel and Weaver's (1989) basic principles of non-verbal communication in its analysis of traditional non-verbal modes of communication in Igbo.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts the survey research design in its analysis of the topic under investigation using interview and participant observation as the major research instruments. The choice of the above research instruments is to get firsthand information from the respondents on how these non-verbal communication modes manifest in their various Igbo communities. A sample of twenty-four (24) elders was randomly selected from the six Igbo states in Nigeria residing within the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This representative population was interviewed in an ethnographic fieldwork and their responses tape-recorded. Also, the researchers as Igbo people are involved in participant observation. The data collected were presented and explicit conclusion drawn from them.

### 4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

As we said earlier, the system of non-verbal communication is handed down from generation to generation by the older members of the community. Therefore, this section of the paper presents the raw data on the traditional non-verbal modes of communication in Igboland as received from the respondents. The analysis is purely analytical in the sense that we are using the non-verbal information not backed up with statistical information. The nonverbal approaches which are to be pointed out and analysed in this paper fell into these major groups.

- Instrumental Communication
- Iconographic Communication
- Visual Communication
- Animal Communication

#### 4.1 Instrumental Communication

This mode of communication comprises various devices used in rural areas which serve as a way of disseminating information as well as an accompaniment in music, song and dance. Some of the types of instrumental communication include: metal gong – ‘ogene/ogele’, clay pot – ‘udu’, rattle – ‘ichaka’, bell – ‘mgbirimgba’, wooden drum – ‘ekwe’, slit drum – ‘ikoro’.

- **Metal Gong (Ogene/Ogele)**

The metal gong is made from metal and is V - shaped. Gong language is based on tonal patterns that reproduce or replicate the human voice. It is mostly used by the town crier to call all the men or youths in the community for a meeting at the village square. The town crier beats the ogene as early as 5.00 a.m. and does this from house to house or from neighbourhood to neighbourhood and sometime, in the evening (around 6.30 p.m.) preceding the day of the meeting.

In Igboland, the metal gong is a very effective tool of communication and the use of it has helped the community in such a way that people are not left uninformed, the reason being that when the ogene is sounded, they understand the message it sends and consequently, they answer the call. This mode of communication usually goes with the vocal communication. No wonder Onyealisi, Chima, one of the respondents says that town criers are referred to as village messengers and the metal gong symbolises the authority of the village. This in effect shows that the villagers are tuned in to the sound of the gong. Again, the notes from this communication instrument are interpreted accordingly and receive

attention from specific audience to whom they are directed. Furthermore, Mr. Isaac Igbokwe observes that it is also used by the *dibija* 'native doctor' to speak to ancestral spirits and during the installation of kings.

- **Clay Pot (Udu)/Rattle (Ichaka)**

Udu is made from clay, with a big opening on top and a smaller opening at the side, which, when beaten, produces melodious sounds. It is mainly used by women as a musical instrument. Madam Ijeoma Elemuo from Isukwato community in Imo state notes that the *udu* is used to communicate the birth of a baby.

On the other hand, the *ichaka* is a calabash that is decorated with beads threaded on strings around it such that when beaten, it produces melodious sounds. According to Mrs. Ifeoma Nwalĩ from Ebonyi State, wherever a woman puts to bed, the women would all go to the house of the woman with *ichaka*, playing, dancing and singing. Once the *ichaka* is sounded, it communicates to other women that a child has been born, then, they trace the location where the birth has taken place through the help of the sounding *ichaka*. Then, they gather at the house of their fellow woman who just put to bed.

- **Wooden Drum (Ekwe)/Slit Drum (Ikoro)**

The wooden drum is made from tree-trunk to enable it produce mellifluous sounds. The bark is removed and an opening made at the side through which a hollow space is made in the trunk. In other words, it is formed by carving a hollow in a section of the thick wood, usually of iroko stalk. It may have one or two slits. A stroke on the lips of the drum produces a high tone. When struck with a stick, it produces sounds which come in various forms (tunes) and have various designations. In Igboland, there are two types of wooden drum viz *Ekwe* and *Ikoro*. Mr. Ogwugwu Boniface, one of our respondents, says that the slit drum (*Ikoro*) is bigger than *ekwe* and that it is rarely used. It is usually used to announce the death of a prominent man, dissemination of war news or the onset of an important festival. However, according to Ogwugwu Boniface from Anambra state, the *ikoro* communicates different shades of message. It is an alarm signal that calls on all adult males of the community. In this way it serves to inform the community in times of emergency. On the other hand, *ekwe* is used by the town-crier in information dissemination task. It gives the town-crier open air to dish his information out to the villagers. It is possible to rest it on the shoulder or the arms of the town-crier during the period of announcement. Both *ikoro* and *ekwe* have two tones. When they sound *tum tum tum* and in one tone, according to Nwike Sampson, it means that something good has happened in the community, but when they sound *tum tum tum; gbom gbom gbom*, it shows or signifies that something strange or unpleasant has happened in the community. According to Achebe (1958), when Ezeudu died, his death was communicated to Umuofia with the *ikoro*. *Ikoro* is permanently kept at a village square because of its heaviness but *Ekwe* can be freely carried about. However, they are effective in information dissemination.

- **Bell (Mgbirimgba)**

The bell according to Akpabio (2003) has a wooden handle form on which a conical shaped metal is suspended. It produces sound when the bell-shaped metal suspended on the inside of the cone-shape structure hits the side of the structure in the process of jiggling. Mrs. Nwagbo says that the bell is mostly used to get attention, opening as well as to announce the closing and break times of meetings. In many Igbo communities, it is used by native doctors to communicate to the spirits. She further says that it is used in gatherings for drawing people's attention and to tell the audience to keep quiet. Also, in some Igbo communities according to Anayo Ugwulo, traders use the bell to draw the attention of buyers to

their wares. Rev. Onuorah also says that in churches, the bell is used to inform the members of the time for the church service. On a general note, Wilson (1998:34) posits another function of the bell:

In old Calabar traditional society, the bell is strongly associated with secret societies like Ekpe (a male-dominated cultural society which also performs judiciary functions of the type performed by judges and magistrates), Ekpo Nyoho and Ekong societies.

However, it is worthy of note to state that apart from the communicative function performed by the above instruments, they are also used for entertainment purposes during festivals or wrestling ceremonies.

## 4.2 Iconographic Communication

Iconography has to do with items representing something else. In other words, they are items or elements that pass across messages. However, based on a society's peculiar history, experiences and circumstances, elements, symbols and icons do not uniformly communicate the same message, (Akpabio 2003). Therefore, based on established ways of doing things, the elements may communicate messages understood by members of the community. Below are some iconographic elements in the Igbo community.

- **Palm Frond (*omụ*)**

The use of the young/tender palm frond to communicate various meanings in Igboland is very unique. Chief Godwin Oghonna of Ngwa in Abia state States that *omụ* is placed on a piece of land as a warning as regards the use of such land whether in dispute or not. It shows that a place is a no-go area, serving as a symbol of traditional authority and a reminder that disobedience will result in dire consequences. Likewise, when it is tied to a tree, it sends across the message that nobody is expected to touch the fruit of the tree. All the respondents also agreed that when the palm frond is seen on a vehicle, it communicates or tells the public that a corpse is being conveyed in the vehicle. When somebody dies, the palm frond is usually tied on the diseased house or stall (if he/she is a trader), says Elder Ben Odo. It shows that the person is dead and that it prevents the spirits from disturbing the beloved ones. Mz. Daniel Uzoka from Enugu State says that if anybody is suspected to be a wizard or witch, the palm frond is to be placed in front of his/her compound as a sign of warning to the person to desist from evil; otherwise, he/she will be ostracised from the community and also to warn the village that such a person is evil.

On a similar note, Nze Nwankwere, a respondent from Imo State avers that *omụ* is used to show sacred places and great reverence is given to any place where it is tied. Furthermore, he says that during mournful marches, male youths of the community tie *omụ* on their heads and arms to show their grief. *Omụ* can also be used as an instrument of advertisement, says Mr. Elochukwu Ifedi from Obosi in Idemili-North LGA of Anambra State. People use it as a sign-post, showing that palm wine is sold around that place. Furthermore, Mr. Egonwanne Odiri, also from Anambra State, says that *omụ* is also used to indicate the presence of a shrine. Additionally, when an individual is seen with a palm frond in his/her mouth, it communicates the message that such an individual is on an important mission. As such, he does not talk to any person, consequently, nobody greets him until he or she is through with the mission and removes the palm frond from the mouth.

- **Native White Chalk (Nzu)**

The native chalk in Igboland plays a vital role in information dissemination. It symbolises purity of heart and



peace offering. In any traditional gathering, when strokes of lines are drawn on the ground using the *nzu*, it means that the titled men are pure in heart. When given to a visitor, the visitor knows that he is fully welcome by his host; while on the other hand, a refusal by the visitor signifies grudges towards the host. Mr. Jude Omeke says that in Uzouwani LGA of Enugu State, *nzu* is used by women who put to bed. It is usually kept outside the hut of a woman who has just given birth. The visitors rub the *nzu* on their left or right arm depending on whether it was a male or female child that was born. “The right arm signifies the birth of a male while the left arm signifies the birth of a female”, says Mr. Omeke. Moreover, *nzu* is used to draw a bold line on a tuber of yam which is usually sent to the parents of a woman who has put to bed to inform them that their daughter has been delivered of a baby. Therefore, when a man is seen on the road with such a tuber of yam, it communicates that a child is born to him and people go on to congratulate him. Also, during celebrations, women, with bowls of mixed native white chalk, mark their foreheads and go about jubilating with the bowls asking people to share in their joy by applying the substance on their foreheads. However, Mrs. Ifeoma Okolie observes that, presently, powder has come to replace the native white chalk, *nzu*. It then holds that, for instance, when you see a group of women with powder prominently rubbed on their arms or neck regions, it is an indication that somebody has put to bed and to share in their joy, one can collect some from them and rub as well.

- **Feathers (Ugbene)**

There are different types of feathers according to Onowu Steve Nwanguma, which signify different things. Generally, according to him, eagle feathers placed on red caps of some individuals show that they are titled men. Other feathers, not the eagle feather according to Onowu Steve, like the feather of a vulture, among others, are mostly used by native doctors in their shrine during sacrifices.

- **Body Decorative Die (Uri/Uhie)**

In Igbo community, Mrs. Dorathy Ezugwu posits that *uri* is very popular as a means of symbolising the readiness of young girls for marriage. She says that with their supple bodies fully decorated with *uri* or *uhie* and uncovered, with the beads to match, these young maidens would troop to the market square on appointed days of such ceremonies to dance before their prospective suitors, making them come forward the next day with their marriage proposals. Again, whenever one is seen with *uri* rubbed around one's eyes, people will know that one has a patient with measles and does not want to contract it. The presence of *uhie* round the eyes of an adult male in Ikwo, an Igbo community in Ebonyi State, according to Kalu Sunday, communicates to people that he is a native doctor or the messenger of a deity.

- **Kola Nut (Qji)**

Qji is an edible fruit from the *qji* plant. It is eaten throughout the whole Igbo community, including some other parts of Nigeria. But *qji* is held in high esteem in all Igbo communities. Because of its vital role in Igbo life, it is equated with life. No wonder Achebe (1958) says that who brings kola brings life. The kola nut is not just a fruit that can be eaten anyhow. Therefore, when the kola nut is offered to a stranger or visitor, it signifies acceptance or a hearty welcome. Kola is naturally arranged in pods and each pod can have many seeds in it. Each seed is split along its lines into lobes. These lobes have significant meanings they communicate. For instance, a kola nut without any lobe is not eaten. It communicates bad omen. One with two lobes is called *qji Ikenga* (Ikenga is the right hand of any man. In other words, it shows a man's strength). Four lobes signify the four Igbo market days – Eke, Orie, Afọ and Nkwọ. Five, six or more lobes signify

fertility and productivity. Also, there is special species of kola known as *Qji Ugo* (Eagle Kola nut). When *Qji Ugo* is offered to a visitor, it shows deep love for the visitor by the host, says Ogwugwu Boniface.

### 4.3 Visual Communication

In visual communication, a lot of cues are supplied by one's physical appearance, colour, clothing, hairdo, tribal marks, etc. But only colour is discussed in this paper because of space.

#### Colour

The use of colour or a combination of colours carries a significant message in every Igbo community. Generally, in Igbo culture, three prominent colors stand out, viz. white, black and red. White signifies purity, innocence, holiness and peace. To most Igbo communities according to Amaechi Akudo from Rivers state, any time people are to engage in war, once the white chalk or cloth is seen, it means that peace must reign; no matter how serious the offence might be. Furthermore, she says that when a woman or man dresses in white clothing, it means that he/she has something to do with the gods of the river or that the person is mourning. But she quickly added that putting on white for mourning was a recent development because according to her, black was usually used for mourning. Consequently, black generally signifies evil, unpleasant experience, mourning, suspicion, etc. Mr. Tobi James also says that in Rivers State, if a man or woman appears in black clothing, it shows that she/he lost a dear one. But this, according to Mr. Alqzie Ejizi, is usually followed by the total shaving of hair for the mourner. On the other hand, red signifies danger, fire and blood, and it is mostly used by ritualists, native doctors, witches and cultists just like black. When a red piece of cloth is attached to a farm, says Anayo Ugwu, it means that nobody should move near the farm. Again, when it is tied on a fruit, it means 'don't touch'. Dood (1966:298) sees colors in Africa thus:

With black, words like the following come to mind: inferior, unpleasant, evil suspicious, disagreeable, and undesirable. With white: light, hope, joy, purity. With red: power, might, wealth. Even on this Island, however, some variability is noted, for example, blue is the favourite colour of the Hova, but among the Sakalava, it is the colour of mourning.

Based on the above explication, it is obvious that colour communicates, denotes and connotes one meaning or the other depending on the community, people or group.

### 4.4 Animal Communication

In the Igbo community, animals are used in non-verbal communication. Anytime a type of animal comes out at a particular time and place, it communicates either something good or bad. According to one of our respondents, Chief Mike Ejiofor, in most Igbo communities, different animals communicate different messages. Such animals include owl, bee, soldier ant, cock, etc.

- **Owl**

Whenever an owl cries in a person's house or compound in Igboland, it is a sign of an impending death in that household. No wonder, the owl is called the bird of bad omen. As a matter of fact, for an owl to be seen around one's compound, especially in the night, signifies death. Mrs. Dorathy Ezugwu says that as a Christian, when she hears the cry of an owl, she starts praying immediately against any untimely death. However, the traditionalists would go to the native doctor (*dibia*) of the community to seek for a solution or to receive a form of protection from death.

- **Soldier Ant**

Whenever soldier ants gather where there is a corpse according to Nze Chima Onyealisi from Imo State, it signifies that before the death of the deceased, he/she was very wicked, had used diabolical means to kill people and had done so many terrible things to people while he/she was alive. When soldier ants are discovered around a corpse, Nze Onyema says that such a corpse will no longer be buried in the compound; rather, it will be taken to the evil forest where it will be hung on a tree and left for the spirits and physical elements to feast on.

- **Bees**

Mr. Isaac Igbokwe and six other respondents agree that whenever a swarm of bees come to a person's house, it signifies a bad omen. Therefore, whenever they are seen, the household members would go to a native doctor to inquire from him the evil message the bees brought and also to find out a way of preventing or appeasing the gods. The presence of bees in homes instead of the forest, therefore, communicates danger.

- **Cock**

One of our respondents, Ifeoma Nwali, says that the cock crows very early in the morning around 3.00 a.m. and crows again around 5.00 a.m. to announce the breaking of a new day. She further says that whenever the cock crows at an odd hour, it shows that things are abnormal.

Finally, we can, therefore, say that the main non-verbal instruments by the town-criers in almost all Igbo communities are the metallic gong (ogene), wooden drum (Ekwe), and the slit drum (ikoro), while the young palm frond (omụ), native chalk (nzu), kolanut (oji) are for communicating signs and symbols. The notes from these communication instruments, signs and symbols are interpreted very well by the people to whom they are directed. The sounding of the wooden drum (Ekwe) and the slit drum (ikoro) in the night normally portends an event of bad omen. This could be the announcement of the death of an influential villager or a clarion call to keep everybody on the alert.

## 5. EFFECT OF NON-VERBAL MODES OF COMMUNICATION IN IGBOLAND

A look at how the non verbal modes of communication influence the Igbo people shows that the non-verbal modes of communication are very effective because they communicate well to the people and provide information or alert them accordingly. These modes of communication have been in existence from time immemorial and have become part of the life of the people living in the different Igbo communities in that whenever a particular instrument is sounded for instance, they depict the sound and immediately understand what that sound has communicated to them.

In various Igbo communities, quite a number of non-verbal communication outlets have served as effective signals to the people, which have also helped in one way or the other in achieving social cohesion and avert dangers or mishaps. For instance, Wilson (1998:41) notes that "instrumental modes of non-verbal communication produce sounds that signify or symbolise a communication event within the context of specific setting." In relation to Igboland, the sounds of drum, bell, gong, flute, etc, serve as signals of communication in different contexts. As we stated earlier, when a prominent ruler passes on, the *ikoro* would be sounded to indicate that somebody great in the community has passed on. Likewise, in iconographic and visual communication, when a red cloth is found tied somewhere around a farmland, it indicates that some spiritual forces have been contracted to ward off intruders. When palm fronds are kept on a farmland or when it is

placed on a vehicle, it indicates that such piece of land should not be used until the dispute over it is settled. Consequently, if placed on a vehicle, it indicates the vehicle is conveying a corpse.

In Igboland, much importance is attached by the inhabitants to non-verbal means of communication. Achebe (1958:41) in support of this fact says that *Umụọfịa* was still swallowed up in sleep and silence when the *ikoro* began to talk, men stirred on their bamboo beds and listened anxiously. Again, Ugboajah (1982) posits that communication in traditional Igbo communities is mainly a matter of human inter-relationships. It depends on one's attitude to one's neighbours. Therefore, accepting or rejecting the news depends on how such an activity affects established relationships. Traditional non-verbal means of communication could be ranked alongside mass media in terms of its effectiveness in bringing about the desired result expected from the audience. In fact, in some cases where the mass media fails as a result of inherent barriers, the traditional nonverbal mode is applied and the desired result is obtained. It is, therefore, logical to assert that the traditional non-verbal mode despite its being narrow in scope is very effective as a means of communication. This assertion hinges on the fact that if the ultimate aim in communication is the creation of awareness to reinforce or erode existing knowledge or information with a view to changing attitude or eliciting response (which the traditional non-verbal modes do) it follows that the traditional non-verbal modes are supplementary and/or complementary to the mass media's effective role. Therefore, the list of messages that are conveyed through non verbal modes are endless.

Although one may say that we are now in a modernised age where everything is being computerised, it has not changed the old traditional ways of communication but has only succeeded in introducing new forms of communication in the Igbo community. It unites people; brings about development by sharing ideas. Even though some Igbos who are Christians see some of these nonverbal modes of communication as fetish and diabolic, it still does not change the fact that they are very effective ways of disseminating information in various Igbo communities. No wonder, Akpabio (2003) says that non verbal communication is alive and well. He further states that in the urban settings, various components of traditional communication are present though to a lesser degree. For instance, information gets passed around by town-criers in all Igbo communities. Moreover, no matter how hard we try to avoid the use of non-verbal forms of communication, we cannot do without them because we communicate daily, using these modes both intentionally and otherwise.

## 6. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The essence of this paper is to ascertain the effectiveness of the non-verbal Igbo traditional modes of communication. Based on the findings of the paper, therefore, we observe that communication in whatever form is very vital in any human community because without interaction among people, there will be problems with grave potentials in hindering the achievement of communal oneness, progress and development in the community.

The paper also posits that the use of non-verbal modes/forms to communicate various meanings in the Igbo socio-cultural context is unique. The association between signs and symbols makes the system of meaning transfer as a communicative process, quick, clear and unambiguous. The meaning communicated may be that of danger, warning against certain actions or behaviours, a demand for caution, complaint against trespass, keep off, defer condolence visits, announce death or bereavement, preserve, interact, educate the villages, depict authority or announce festivals, show provocation or emotional upset. The semantic content in each case is perfectly perceived and correctly interpreted, and adequately, socially complied with by the members of the community. This has given a great sense of cohesion to the socio-cultural life of the Igbos.



Again, before the advent of the white-man in Igboland, from the findings of this paper, non-verbal communication has been the main system of interaction, the channel through which information is disseminated. For instance, the *Ekwe/Ikoro* performs a very important function by spreading information in the community. It serves as an intermediary between the village head and the villagers. This is because it conveys the messages of the community head to the people, who in turn will get back to the village head. Most of the time, the *Ekwe/Ikoro* has to embellish whatever message it has for the village in its own peculiar language laden with riddles, idioms and proverbs. It usually codes the message in order to drive home the news. Based on the above analysis, the *Ikoro/Ekwe* was and is still very popular among the village folks who are always ready to listen to it so as to be abreast of current news and events. Even today, in spite of the numerous electronic broadcast stations with their advocative and informative programmes, different Igbo communities still enjoy the functions of the *Ekwe/Ikoro*, which are often more effective.

In conclusion, we can say that the communication needs of today are not likely to remain the same in future because of the dynamics of change. The direction of change could be to the advantage of the society. Also, the competitive relationship that exists between western and traditional modes today makes it possible that nothing is quite definite about what the future form of Igbo non-verbal traditional modes will be. But we can say that, in future, some of the functions of traditional non-verbal modes may be taken over by western media. However, one thing is definite, that for a number of reasons, most non-verbal channels would continue to be used for various communication purposes. The needs and functions may vary but there is no likelihood that non-verbal modes will be substituted entirely with western media. This is because non-verbal traditional modes of communication are organised around human beings and as far as human beings exist, they will carry out human activities in relation to their cultural settings. The futures of Igbo traditional non-verbal modes can be said to lie in tradi-modern communication system, which combines traditional media practices at various levels of our communication enterprise with modern media.

The paper, therefore, recommends that more interest be taken to study the various non-verbal modes of communication used in different Igbo communities. Such non-verbal modes that are effective need more attention since much meaningful and useful exchange takes place without noise and also a lot of meaning and discipline are communicated without words through these modes. It is also worthy to point out at that some people have always either refused to see something good in traditional non-verbal modes of communication or failed to appreciate it generally. They failed to realize or to acknowledge that before any meaningful developmental venture is undertaken by any community, that traditional communication is usually used to mobilise people. Therefore, the necessity to project these traditional modes of communication as being potential enough for mass communication cannot be over-looked.

It is, therefore, important to guard against cultural influences from penetrating into the fabrics of our social ideas – those ideas that identify us. We should begin anew to fight the obstacles resulting from this cultural alleviation. Macbride (1981) says that the problem of fostering endogenous culture in the wake of intrusion is also a major issue, which should be fought to maintain internal cohesion within a culture.

Finally, this paper is a recipe for re-awakening the self consciousness of the Igbo people, and to protect the Igbo culture from decaying and fizzling out in future. Traditional non-verbal modes are indispensable elements in our cultural heritage and should be encouraged and allowed to function effectively in the context of our cultural upliftment. These modes if encouraged to continue existing will be made to function with modern modes of communication in order to foster rural development. This is because according to Tonki (1979), languages can easily reinforce the hegemony of a

dominant elite; language is a prime conveyor of culture. Hence, if we diminish the cultural standing of a language, we disorient its inheritors; if we allow a language to die out, the result is an irreplaceable cultural loss. That is, if the traditional non-verbal modes of communication are allowed to rot away, we are stripping ourselves of untold harm in the annals of history. Consequently, if they are preserved and nurtured, they will go a long way in feeding our populace with adequate information necessary for social and cultural cohesion and development. Therefore, we must strive to protect and guard our traditional non-verbal modes jealously, develop and improve them at all levels as a precautionary measure against the intimidating influence of the modern mass media.

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## APPENDICES

## Primary Sources

Table 1

S/N	Names of Respondents	Age	Occupation	Date Interviewed
1	Mr. Onyealisi Chima	69	Driver	04 – 10 – 2013
2	Mr. Isaac Igbokwe	92	Rt. Farmer	08 – 10 – 2013
3	Mrs. Ijeoma Elemmuo	71	Rt. Teacher	11 – 10 – 2013
4	Mrs. Ijeoma Nwali	62	Farmer	13 – 10 – 2013
5	Mr. ogwugwu Boniface	62	Driver	16 – 10 – 2013
6	Mr. Nwike Sampson	81	Rt. Civil Servant	20 – 10 – 2013
7	Mrs. Nwagboo Mary	76	Rt. Trader	23 – 10 – 2013
8	Dr. Anayo Ugwulo	60	Medical Doctor	01 – 11 – 2013
9	Rev. Canon Onuorah Nnamdi	65	Priest	03 – 11 – 2013
10	Dr. Godwin Ogbonna	77	Rt. Lecturer	05 – 11 – 2013
11	Elder Ben Odo	70	Business man	07 – 11 – 2013
12	Mz. Daniel Uzoka	90	Rt. Farmer	10 – 12 – 2013
13	Nze Nwangwu... Obiora	84	Rt. Farmer	17- -12- -2013
14	Mr. Elochukwu Ifedi	74	Rt. Civil Servant	19 – 12 – 2013
15	Chief Egonwanne Odiri	76	Land Agent	21 – 12 – 2013
16	Mr. Ebo Ndulue	62	Civil Servant	23 – 12 – 2013
17	Onyishi Jude Omeke	75	Artisan	26 – 12 – 2013
18	Mrs. Ifeoma Okolie	67	Cook	28 – 12 – 2013
19	Onowu Steve Nwanguma	78	Traditional Ruler	30 – 13 – 2013
20	Mrs. Dorathy Ezugwu	66	Trader	20 – 01 – 2014
21	Sunday Kalu	68	Trader	24 – 01 – 2014
22	Amaechi Akudo	61	Principal	26 – 01 – 2014
23	Tobi James	73	Politician	28 – 01 – 2014
24	Chief Mike Ejiofor	80	Rt. Lecturer	04 – 02 – 2014

